

Revisiting the 19th-Century Russian Pogroms, Part 1: Russia's Jewish Question

May 8, 2012

Andrew Joyce

The anti-Jewish riots, or “pogroms” of late 19th-century Russia represent one of the most decisive periods in modern Jewish, if not world, history. Most obviously, the riots had demographic implications for western countries – around 80% of today’s western Diaspora Jews are descendants of those Jews who left Russia and its environs during the period 1880–1910. But perhaps the most lasting legacy of the period was the enhancement of Jewish “national self-awareness,” and the accelerated development of “modern, international Jewish politics.”^[1]

The pogroms themselves have consistently been portrayed by (mainly Jewish) historians as “irrational manifestations of hatred against Jews,”^[2] where peasant mobs were the unwitting dupes of malevolent Russian officials. Other explanations are so lacking in evidence, and so devoid of logic that they stretch credulity to breaking point. For example, University of British Columbia Professor, Donald G. Dutton has asserted that the mobs were not motivated by “the sudden rapid increase of the Jewish urban population, the extraordinary economic success of Russian Jews, or the involvement of Jews in Russian revolutionary politics” but rather by the “blood libel.”^[3]

Little or no historiography has been dedicated to peeling back the layers of “refugee” stories to uncover what really happened in the Russian Empire in the years before and during the riots. This lack of historical enquiry can be attributed at least in part to a great reluctance on the part of Jewish historians to investigate the pogroms in any manner beyond the merely superficial. In addition, historical enquiry by non-Jewish historians into the subject has been openly discouraged. For example, when Ukrainian historians discovered evidence proving that contemporary media reports of Jewish casualties in that nation were exaggerated, the Jewish genealogy website ‘JewishGen,’ **responded** by stating: “We believe that [these facts] are more than irrelevant because it redirects public attention from the major topic: the genocidal essence of pogroms.”

Advertisement

It should suffice to state here that this response contravenes the very essence of historical enquiry – to uncover history as it actually happened, irrespective of the uncomfortable truths which may lie therein. The statement could be translated as “Let’s not let the facts get in the way of a good story.” Also, as this paper will show, the tendency to portray the riots as “genocidal” is completely lacking in foundation. University of California Los Angeles Professor of Sociology, Michael Mann, has provided substantial evidence indicating that “most perpetrators did not conceive of removing Jews altogether.”^[4]

JewishGen’s allusion to genocide should also be seen as part of a broader problem in modern Jewish historiography. Rather than seeing the pogroms as products of specific local circumstances, in which Jews would play at least an implicit role, there has been a tendency to use them for comparative purposes. John Klier states that when used in a comparative sense, “examples are drawn almost exclusively from the 20th century, and these events are then read back into the earlier period of 1881–2,” making any objective historical enquiry difficult, and implying the presence of some non-existent ‘pan-European’ malaise in anti-Jewish actions.

Nonetheless, this series of essays will seek to peel back the myths, to tease a few threads of truth from the veil which covers these events. Encouragingly, some work has already begun in this respect. I.M. Aronson's assertion that the pogroms were "planned or encouraged to one degree or another, by elements within the government itself,"^[5] has been dealt a death blow in recent years through the concerted work of a small number of non-Jewish historians, mostly notably, University College London's Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, John Doyle Klier. In his 2005 work, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881–2*, Klier asserts that "contemporary research has dispelled the myth that Russian officials were responsible for instigating, permitting, or approving the pogroms."^[6] This series of essays will attempt to move further, adhering to the belief that the facts of the events remain paramount to historical enquiry rather than being a 'distracting' irrelevance. The series will begin with an explanation of the origins of Russia's "Jewish Question." Subsequent articles will concern the pogroms themselves and how myth and exaggeration have plagued our conception of them. Finally, I will examine why these myths were developed, and the broader implications of the prevalence of myth in Jewish 'history.'

Part One: Russia's Jewish Question.

In 1772 the Russian Empire orchestrated the first partition of Poland, "erasing from the geopolitical map of Europe a large kingdom, which in the seventeenth century had extended over broad areas between Prussia and southern Ukraine."^[7] Significantly, in doing so, the Russian Empire also oversaw "the dissolution of the largest Jewish collective in the world."^[8] Polish Jewry was divided into three parts – those in Posen came under the sovereignty of Prussia, those in Galicia came under the sovereignty of Austria, and those in Poland proper came under the sovereignty of the Russian Empire.^[9] In Poland proper, the Polish public turned in on itself, searching frantically for the reasons for the ruin of the nation, and in doing so, states Israel Friedlander, "the Jewish problem could not but force itself on its attention."^[10]

Investigations carried out by special committees discovered that in the decades prior to partition, Polish Jewry had enjoyed a demographic explosion, with Jews now representing almost 20% of the entire population. In addition, it was discovered that Jews controlled a full 75% of Polish exports, and that many were now spilling out of overpopulated urban centres into the countryside, making a living by monopolising the sale of liquor to peasants.^[11] By 1774, complaints were reaching Russian officials from non-Jewish merchants who argued that Jewish ethnic networking was propping up the monopoly of exports, and that this monopoly would shortly have dire implications for the consumer.^[12] These revelations were the key motivating factors in the decision to expel Warsaw's Jews in 1775, and until the early 19th century there was a kind of stand-off between Poles and Jews.^[13] Napoleon's establishment of the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807 did little to alter the situation, as Napoleon acceded to local sentiment which held that Jews should not feel the benefit of the new constitution until they had "eradicated their peculiar characteristics."^[14] In 1813, the government of the Duchy moved to break the Jewish monopoly on liquor, banning all Jews from selling alcohol in the villages, bringing an end to the activity of "tens of thousands" of Jewish liquor merchants in the provinces. Not surprisingly, when the Duchy was dissolved in 1815 following Napoleon's failed attempt to invade Russia, Polish Jewry shed no tears.

In late 1815, the Congress of Vienna was held. The aim of the congress was to give its assent to the formation of a new autonomous Polish kingdom under the sovereignty of Russia. Although the bulk of Polish Jewry remained within the newly established kingdom, tens of thousands also poured forth into other areas of the Russian Empire, ushering in an uncomfortable age of fraught Russian-Jewish relations. The immediate reaction of the Russian

government to the acquisition of such large, and unwanted, Jewish populations was to prevent the penetration of these populations from intrusion into the old Russian territories, and the solution reached was one of containment. A new kind of settlement was created in provinces along the western frontier, and it became known as the “Pale of Settlement.” Although a large amount of negative connotations have been attributed to the Pale, it was not an impermeable fortress. Certain Jews were permitted to reside outside these provinces, they could visit trade fairs, and Jews were even permitted to study at Russian universities provided they did not exceed quotas. By 1860, more than half of world Jewry resided in the Pale.

Following the Congress of Vienna, wherever Jews resided in the Russian Empire, they overwhelmingly “served in a variety of middleman roles.” In some cities, “the Jewish mercantile element was numerically superior to the Christian,” and there was a gradual move towards the reacquisition of the liquor trade.^[15] According to Klier, by 1830 Belorussian Jews were found to be “totally dominating trade” in that country.^[16] It was largely Klier’s work in the late 1980s which began to truly shed light on the origins of Russian-Jewish relations prior to 1914. Klier, born into a Catholic family in Kansas, “rejected what might be called the Fiddler on the Roof pieties and simplifications. In book after book, he emphasised that what the tsars and their ministers wanted, above all else, was for the Jewish settlements to be orderly and productive.”^[17] Klier further stressed that the much-maligned Pale of Settlement was simply the only response that the Russian administration could come up with, faced as they were with the “baffling question” of how to deal with the “fanaticism of ultra-Orthodox Jewry” which was thoroughly “unassimilable to official purposes.”^[18]

In 1841, investigations were carried out into Russia’s Jewish communities, and the subsequent reports pointed to three significant problems. The first was persistent Jewish difference in dress, language, and religious and communal organization. The idea underpinning this aloofness from non-Jewish society, the ‘Chosen’ status of the Jews and an accompanying ethnic chauvinism, was said to be particularly harmful to Jewish-Gentile relations, particularly when it was reinforced through “a system of male education that was thought to inculcate anti-Christian interpretations of the Talmud.”^[19] The second, related, problem was that Jewish economic practices were also rooted in this aloofness. The Talmud “encouraged and justified unreserved economic exploitation based on cheating and exploiting the non-Jews,”^[20] in a validation of Max Weber’s theory of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ ethics, whereby “members of a cohesive social unit observe different moral standards among themselves compared with those observed in relation to strangers.”^[21] The third aspect of the Russian ‘Jewish Question,’ was the issue of Jewish loyalty. The Jews of the Russian Empire had evidently retained the *kahal* of pre-partition Polish Jewry. The *kahal* was a formal system of Jewish communal leadership and government, entirely separate from the Russian state. Although tacitly tolerated by the state for its tax collection capabilities, Jewish loyalty to the *kahal* was absolute, going beyond the merely fiscal. Almost all Jews continued to resort to Jewish courts.

John Klier states that following these revelations, “state and society shared a consensus that Jews could be – and must be – reformed and transformed into good subjects of the realm.”^[22] Under Emperor Alexander I (1801–25) there had been attempts to encourage Jews to pursue more productive economic activities. Generous concessions were made to Jews in the hope that they would abandon their middleman roles, as well as the distilleries and taverns of the provinces, and take up work in agricultural colonies. Klier states that the “embeddedness of the Jews in the economic and social life of the imperial borderlands ensured that despite legislative initiatives, Jewish economic life remained largely unchanged.”^[23]

In 1844, under Nicholas I, the Russian government began a program of reforms and legislation designed to break down Jewish exclusivity and incorporate the nation's Jews more fully into Russian society. Not surprisingly, the government first took aim at the *kahal*, banning it as "an illegal underground structure."^[24] The significance of the banning of the *kahal* went beyond tackling the issue of Jewish loyalty. The mutual assistance offered by the *kahal* was felt to have had economic implications – "it was the mutual support provided by the *kahal* that ensured that Jews were more than a match for any competitor, even the arch-exploiter of the Russian village, the kulak."^[25] The civil rights of any "Jews who were perceived to be engaged in productive undertakings" were extended, though there were few takers. Nicholas I even conceived of, and supported, the establishment of state-financed Jewish schools, in the hope that such establishments would lead to the development of a more progressive and integrative Russian Jewry. Unfortunately for Nicholas, what his system produced was a cadre of Jewish intellectuals profoundly hostile to the state.

Emperor Alexander II continued the efforts of Mother Russia to gather in her Jews. He abolished serfdom in 1861. He relaxed efforts to change the economic profile of Russian Jewry, extending the rights of educated Jews and large-scale merchants. His was a program aimed at reconciliation, an abandonment of the stick in favour of the carrot. Education was made fully open to Jews, and Jews could sit on the juries of Russian courts. Conditions on settlement and mobility in the Pale were relaxed further. Klier states that "Jews even became the subject of sympathetic concern for the leaders of public opinion. Proposals for the complete emancipation of the Jews were widely mooted in the press."^[26]

These measures, however, were also accompanied by a growing uneasiness with the way the Jews of Russia took advantage of them. There was little in the way of gratitude, and the measures did not bring about the great changes that had been hoped for. The nationalist revolt of the Poles in 1863, and the fact that a large number of wealthy Jews were found to have funded some of the rebels cast new doubts on Jewish loyalty. Having emancipated the peasantry and adopted a paternalistic concern for the former serfs, the government also viewed with alarm the rapidity with which the "Jews were exploiting the unsophisticated and ignorant rural inhabitants, reducing them to a Jewish serfdom."^[27] It also quickly became apparent that despite new military legislation, Jews were noticeable in their overwhelming avoidance of military service. In retaliation, the government clamped down on rural tavern ownership, and introduced more stringent recruitment procedures specifically for Jews. It has been claimed that Jews were also banned from land ownership at this time, but Klier provides evidence that Jews were still able to buy any peasant properties sold at auction for tax arrears, as well as any property within the Pale not owned by Russian gentry.^[28]

By the end of Alexander II's reign, disillusionment with the government's policy at handling the Jewish Question was widespread. The vast majority of Jews had stubbornly persisted in the unproductive trades, continued in their antipathy to Russian culture, and refused to make any meaningful contribution to Russian society. An air of resignation swept the country. Some newspapers even advocated abolishing the Pale, if only to alleviate that region from bearing the burden of the Jews alone. Other papers opposed this "fearing for the welfare of the peasantry at a time when the cultural level of the peasantry made them an easy target for exploitation."^[29] Meanwhile Jews were beginning to swamp higher education establishments. In Odessa, there were reports that in school after school, Jews were "driving Christians from the school benches," and "filling up the schools."^[30]

On the eve of the assassination of Alexander II, Russia's Jewish Question remained unanswered. Decades of legislation had done little to change the nature of Russian Jewry, which remained ethnically, politically, and culturally homogenous. The new Jewish intelligentsia had turned on the hand that fed it, failing to encourage the

adaptation of their fellow Jews, moving instead to defend them and advocate for their interests. In terms of educational and social opportunities, Jews had been given an inch and taken a mile. They had swamped the schools, and added to a group of emergent Jewish capitalists. In 1879 Russian authorities were being lobbied by a Rabbinic Commission for full emancipation, an ominous prospect for those concerned about the well-being of Russian peasantry.

The breaking point, when it came, did not emerge from the ether, but from this historical background. In part two we will examine the more immediate origins of the anti-Jewish riots and how the riots proceeded. We will do away with petty distractions, dispelling myths with facts; and as we venture into the Pale, we now do so with a more complete view of the Jew we find there.

End of Part 1.

-
- [1] John Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) p.xiii.
- [2] Jack Glazier, *Dispersing the Ghetto: The Relocation of Jewish Immigrants Across America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998) p.9.
- [3] Donald Dutton, *The Psychology of Genocide, Massacres and Extreme Violence* (New York: Prager, 2007) p.40
- [4] Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p.142.
- [5] I.M. Aronson, 'Geographical and Socioeconomic factors in the 1881 Anti-Jewish Pogroms in Russia,' *Russian Review*, Vol.39, No.1 (Jan. 1980) p.18.
- [6] Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, p.xiv.
- [7] Israel Bartal, *The Jews of Eastern Europe: 1772-1881*, (Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defence, 2005) p.23.
- [8] Ibid, p.24.
- [9] Israel Friedlander, *The Jews of Russia and Poland*, (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1915), p.84.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] Ibid, p.85.
- [12] Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, (Bergenfield: Avontayu, 2000), p.173
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Ibid, p.87.
- [15] Simon Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, (Bergenfield: Avontayu, 2000), p.173
- [16] John Klier, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.4.
- [17]<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2007/oct/26/guardianobituaries.obituaries>
- [18]<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2007/oct/26/guardianobituaries.obituaries>
- [19] Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, p.3.
- [20] Ibid.

[21] Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) p.56.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, p.4

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, p.5

[27] Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-2*, p.5

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid, p.6

[30] Ibid.

Myth and the Russian Pogroms, Part 2: Inventing Atrocities

May 11, 2012

Andrew Joyce

Having grounded ourselves in the history of Russia's Jewish Question, it is now time for us to turn our attention to the anti-Jewish riots of the 1880s. The following essay will first provide the reader with the standard narrative of these events advanced by Jewish contemporaries and the majority of Jewish historians — a narrative which has overwhelmingly prevailed in the public consciousness. The latter half of the essay will be devoted to dissecting one aspect of the Jewish narrative, and explaining how events really transpired. Other aspects of the Jewish narrative will be examined in later entries in this series. While a work like this can come in for heavy criticism from certain sections of the population who may denounce it as 'revisionist,' I can only say that 'revisionism' should be at the heart of every historical work. If we blindly accept the stories that are passed down to us, we are liable to fall victim to what amounts to little more than a glorified game of Chinese whispers. And, if we taboo the right of the historian to reinterpret history in light of new research and new discoveries, then we have become far removed from anything resembling true scholarship.

The Jewish Narrative.

In 1881 the 'Russo-Jewish Committee,' (RJC) an arm of Britain's Jewish elite, mass-produced a pamphlet entitled "The Persecution of the Jews in Russia," and began disseminating it through the press, the churches, and numerous other channels. By 1899, it was embellished and published as a short book, and today digitized copies are freely available online.^[1] By the early 20th century, the pamphlet had even spawned a four-page journal called *Darkest Russia – A Weekly Record of the Struggle for Freedom*, ensuring that the average British citizen did not go long without being reminded of the 'horrors' facing Russian Jews.^[2] The fact that these publications were *mass* produced should provide an indication as to their purpose: It is clear that these publications represented one of the most ambitious propaganda campaign in Jewish history, and combined with similar efforts in the United States, they were aimed at gaining the attention of, and 'educating,' the Western nations and ensuring the primacy of the 'Jewish side of the story.' Implicit in this was not only a desire to provoke anti-Russian attitudes, but also copious amounts of sympathy for the victimized Jews — sympathy necessary to ensure that mass Jewish chain migration to the West went on untroubled and unhindered by nativists. After all, wasn't the bigoted nativist just a step removed from the rampaging Cossack?

Advertisement

The first element of the narrative advanced by the RJC is essentially a manipulation of the history of Russian-Jewish relations. It holds that the Jews of Eastern Europe have been oppressed for centuries, their whole lives "hampered, from cradle to grave, by restrictive laws."^[3] It was claimed that the Russians had an unwritten law: "That no Russian Jew shall earn a living."^[4] Russian Jews, according to the Russo-Jewish Committee, have wanted nothing

more than to participate in Russian society, but have been rebuffed time and again as “heretics and aliens.” The Pale is an impenetrable fortress, where every Jew “must live and die.” Implicit in this interpretation of the history of Russian-Jewish relations is the belief that “the fount and origin of all the ills that assail Russian Jewry” has nothing to do with the Jews themselves, but everything to do with the Church, the State, and the Pale. In essence, the plight of the Jews was the result of nothing more than irrational hatred. Jews adopt a meek and passive role in this narrative, having committed no wrong-doing other than being Jews. They are also presented as the *only* victims of Russian violence. There is no acknowledgement of failed Russian efforts to break down the Jewish walls of exclusivity and claim the Jews as brothers. In fact, there is no reference at all to the walls of exclusivity. The pogroms themselves, according to the Jewish narrative, broke out following the assassination of Alexander II, when shock, anger and a desire for revenge brought this irrational, rootless hatred to the surface.

The second element of the Jewish narrative is that the government and petty officialdom had some role to play in organizing and directing the pogroms. Much disdain is heaped on the government, and petty officialdom, which was said to have been afflicted with “a chronic anti-Semitic outlook.” It was claimed that when the riots began, the government was “not altogether sorry to let the excitement of the people vent itself on the Jews.”^[5] In reference to the restrictive May Laws, the authors were forced to concede they had never really been enforced, but maintained that “whether moderately or rigorously applied, the May Laws still remained on the Russian Statute Book.”^[6]

The third element of the Jewish narrative is that the pogroms were genocidal, and that they had been organized and perpetrated by groups seeking the extermination of the Jews. The 1899 edition of “The Persecution of the Jews in Russia” included a copy of a lengthy letter written to the *London Times* by Nathan Joseph, Secretary of the RJC, dated November 5th, 1890. In the letter, Joseph claimed that in the present circumstances “hundreds of thousands could be exterminated,”^[7] and that Russian legislation in relation to Jews represented “an instrument of torture and persecution.” In sum, the Jews of Russia were claimed to be living under “a sentence of death,” and it was further claimed that “the executions are proceeding.” The letter ends with an appeal to “Civilized Europe” to intervene, chastise Russia, and aid the victimized Jews.^[8]

The fourth key element of the Jewish narrative is that the pogroms were extremely violent in nature. Contemporary media reports especially were the source of most of the atrocity stories, reportedly gleaned from newly-arrived ‘refugees’ who had given statements to the Russo-Jewish Committee about the pogroms they had fled. In these reports, which were carried very regularly by both the *New York Times* and the *London Times*, Russians were charged with having committed the most fiendish atrocities on the most enormous scale. Every Jew in the Russian Empire was under threat. Men had been ruthlessly murdered, tender infants had been dashed on the stones or roasted alive in their own homes. During a British parliamentary consultation on the pogroms in 1905, a Rabbi Michelson claimed that “the atrocities had been so fiendish that they could find no parallel even in the most barbarous annals of the most barbarous peoples.”^[9] The *New York Times* reported that during the 1903 Kishinev pogrom “babes were literally torn to pieces by the frenzied and bloodthirsty mob.”^[10]

A common theme in most contemporary atrocity stories was the brutal rape of Jewish women, with most reports including mention of breasts being hacked off. There are literally thousands of carbon-copy reports in which it is claimed that mothers were raped alongside their daughters. There is simply not enough space to cite extensively from these articles, but they number in their thousands and are available to anyone with access to the digitized archives of any major newspaper, or the microfilm facilities at major libraries. In addition, these articles claim that whole streets inhabited by Jews had been razed, and the Jewish quarters of towns had been systematically fired.

The ‘atrocities’ aspect of the narrative has continued to be advanced by Jewish historians. For example Anita Shapira, in her Stanford-published, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*, claims that “each series of new riots was worse than the one preceding, as if every bloodbath provided a permit for an even worse massacre.”^[11] Shapira further hints that the murder of Jewish babies was common during the pogroms, stating that a common worry of Russian Jews was “Will they take pity on the small babies, who do not even know yet that they are Jews?”^[12] She concludes one particular section on pogrom violence by stating, without referencing any evidence, that there were “numerous acts of rape,” and that “many were massacred — men, women, and children. The cruelty that marked these killings added a special dimension to the feeling of terror and shock that spread in their wake.”^[13] Joseph Brandes, in his 2009 *Immigrants to Freedom* alleges, without citing evidence, that mobs “threw women and children out of the windows” of their homes, and that “heads were battered with hammers, nails were driven into bodies, eyes were gouged out ... and petroleum was poured over the sick found hiding in cellars and they were burned to death.”^[14]

Another crucial element to the Jewish narrative is that Russia is barbaric, ignorant, and uncivilized compared to the Jewish citizens of the country. Russia is said to be lingering in the “medieval stage of development,”^[15] and in comparison to the “ignorant and superstitious peasantry,”^[16] Russia’s Jews are presented as an outpost of Western civilization — they are urban, and “intellectual.” The RJC publication argued that university quotas allowing 5% of the student body to be made up of Jews were insufficient for “an intellectual race.” Astonishingly, it is claimed that “the root of the whole matter is racial arrogance,”^[17] though this arrogance of course is said to emanate from the Russians.

The RJC charged the government with criminal sympathy, the local authorities generally with criminal inaction, and some of the troops with active participation. The situation, they argued, was simply so hopeless and the possibility of extermination was so great, that the only way out was for the civilized nations of the West to throw open their doors and let in these poor ‘Hebrews’.

And to a great extent this is exactly what the churches, the politicians, and the media agreed to. This capitulation to manipulated conscience ushered in the greatest migration in Jewish history, with profound consequences for us all. But there was just one small problem — the vast majority of this narrative was a calculated, designed, and expertly promoted fraud, furthered by the willing participation of Russian-Jewish emigrants who wished to ease their own access to the West and obtain “relief money from Western Europe and America.”^[18]

The ‘Atrocities’

Let us first turn our attention to the atrocity stories. Prior to any major reports of violence, the British public was already being primed to hate the Russian government and accept the Jewish narrative. John Doyle Klier points out that the *Daily Telegraph* was at that time Jewish-owned, and was particularly “severe” in its reports on Russian treatment of Jews prior to 1881.^[19] In the pages of this publication, it was stated that “these Russian atrocities are only the beginning. ... [T]he Russian officials themselves countenance these barbarities.”^[20] Around this time in Continental Europe, Prussian Rabbi Yizhak Rülff established himself as an “intermediary” between Eastern Jewry and the West, and, according to Klier, one of his specialties was the spreading of “sensationalized accounts of mass rape.”^[21]

Other major sources of pogrom atrocity stories were the *New York Times*, the *London Times*, and the *Jewish World*. It would be the *Jewish World* which furnished the majority of these tales, having sent a reporter “to visit

areas that had suffered pogroms.”[22] Most of the other papers simply reprinted what the *Jewish World* reporter sent them. The atrocity stories carried by these newspapers provoked global outrage. There were large-scale public protests against Russia in Paris, Brussels, London, Vienna, and even in Melbourne, Australia. However, “it was in the United States that public indignation reached its height.” Historian Edward Judge states that the American public was spurred on by reports of “brutal beatings, multiple rapes, dismemberment of corpses, senseless slaughter, painful suffering and unbearable grief.”[23]

However, as John Klier states, the reports of the *Jewish World*’s “Special Correspondent,” “raise intriguing problems for the historian.”[24] While his itinerary of travel is described as “plausible,” most of his accounts are “flatly contradicted by the archival record.”[25] His claim that twenty rioters were killed during a pogrom in Kishinev in 1881 has been proven to be a fabrication by records which show that in that city, at that time, “there were no significant pogroms and no fatalities.”[26] Other claims that he witnessed shootings of peasants on his travels have been entirely discredited due to the vast number of minor inaccuracies in those accounts.

Furthermore, Klier states that the atrocity stories compiled by the *Jewish World* correspondent, which went on to be so influential in manipulating Western perceptions of the events, must be treated with “extreme caution.”[27] The reporter “portrayed the pogroms dramatically, as great in scale and inhuman in their brutality. He reported numerous accounts where Jews were burned alive in their homes while the authorities looked on.”[28] There are hundreds of instances where he references the murder of children, the mutilation of women, and the biting off of fingers.

Klier states that “the author’s most influential accounts, given their effect on world opinion, were his accounts of the rape and torture of girls as young as ten or twelve.”[29] In 1881 he reported 25 rapes in Kiev, of which five were said to have resulted in fatalities, in Odessa he claimed 11, and in Elizavetgrad he claimed 30.[30] Rape featured prominently in the reports, not because rapes were common, but because rape “even more than murder and looting” was known to “generate particular outrage abroad.” Klier states that “Jewish intermediaries who were channelling pogrom reports abroad were well aware of the impact of reports of rape, and it featured prominently in their accounts.”[31] The two most dramatic and gruesome accounts came from Berezovka and Borispol. In fact, as the year neared its end, the reports became more and more gruesome and brutal in the details they conveyed.

There is, of course, a reason for this. As the non-Jewish public began to tire of the reports and switched their minds to the coming Christmas festivities, Klier states that records show the RJC made a conscious and calculated decision to “keep Russian Jewry before the eyes of the public.”[32] A key component of this strategy was to take the accounts of the Special Correspondent and publish them in a more widely circulated and respected newspaper. They settled on the London *Times*, which was already predisposed to “critical editorial faulting of the Russian government.” Klier further states that these evidently false reports “garnished with the prestige of *The Times* and devoid of any attribution, subsequently published as a separate pamphlet, and translated into a variety of European languages ... became the definitive Western version of the pogroms.”[33]

As increasingly lurid atrocity tales again captured the attention of the Gentile public, the British Government found itself under pressure to intervene. The British Government, however, adopted a more cautious approach and undertook its own independent investigations into events in the Russian Empire. Its findings, published as a “Blue Book,” “presented an account of events at great variance with that offered by *The Times*.”[34] The most notable aspect of the independent inquiry is the outright denial of mass rape. In January 1882, Consul-General Stanley objected to all of the details contained within reports published by *The Times*, mentioning in particular the unfounded “accounts of the violation of women.”[35] He further stated that his own investigations revealed that there had been no incidences of rape during the Berezovka pogrom, that violence was rare, and that much of the

disturbance was restricted to property damage. In relation to property damage in Odessa, Stanley estimated it to be around 20,000 rubles, and rejected outright the Jewish claim that damage amounted to over one million rubles.

Vice-Consul Law, another independent investigator, reported that he had visited Kiev and Odessa, and could only conclude that “I should be disinclined to believe in any stories of women having been outraged in those towns.”^[36] Another investigator, Colonel Francis Maude, visited Warsaw and said that he could “not attach any importance” to atrocity reports emanating from that city.^[37] At Elizavetgrad, instead of whole streets being razed to the ground, it was discovered that a small hut had lost its roof. It was further discovered that very few Jews, if any, had been intentionally killed, though some died of injuries received in the riots. These were mainly the result of conflicts between groups of Jews who defended their taverns and rioters seeking alcohol. The small number of Jews who had been intentionally killed had fallen victim to unstable individuals who had been drunk on Jewish liquor — accusations of murderous intent among the masses were simply unfounded and unsubstantiated by the evidence.

When these reports were made public, states Klier, they represented “a serious setback for the protest and aid activities of the RJC.”^[38] The *Times* was forced to backtrack, but responded spitefully (and bizarrely) by stating that the indignation of the country was still justified even if the atrocities were “the creations of popular fancy.”^[39] (Reminiscent of the JewishGen response to Ukrainian discoveries mentioned in Part 1 of this series?!) The revelations came at a bad time for the RJC, which was at that time attempting to move the British Government to “act in some way on behalf of persecuted Russian Jewry.”^[40] It resorted to republishing (in the *Times*) its pamphlet on persecution in Russia twice in one month, presumably in the belief that blunt repetition would suffice to overcome tangible evidence. Klier states that the pieces were examples of “masterful” propaganda, as they attempted to undermine the credibility of the Government consuls, while sycophantically appealing to “the wise and noble people of England,” who “will know what weight should be attached to such denials and refutations.”^[41] The RJC offered its own “corroborative evidence of the most undeniable kind,” though of course the exact source of this evidence was not specified beyond “persons occupying high official positions in the Jewish community” and “Jewish refugees.”

The revelations came at a bad time for the RJC, which was at that time attempting to move the British Government to “act in some way on behalf of persecuted Russian Jewry.”^[40] It resorted to republishing (in the *Times*) its pamphlet on persecution in Russia twice in one month, presumably in the belief that blunt repetition would suffice to overcome tangible evidence. Klier states that the pieces were examples of “masterful” propaganda, as they attempted to undermine the credibility of the Government consuls, while sycophantically appealing to “the wise and noble people of England,” who “will know what weight should be attached to such denials and refutations.”^[41] The RJC offered its own “corroborative evidence of the most undeniable kind,” though of course the exact source of this evidence was not specified beyond “persons occupying high official positions in the Jewish community” and “Jewish refugees.”

In essence, the people of western nations were being asked to trust an anonymous Rabbi on the other side of the world rather than identifiable representatives of their own government. The pieces, states Klier, “painted the familiar picture of murder and rape,” and despite the debunking statements of the consuls, “a number of mother/daughter rapes, which had already done so much to outrage British public opinion, were again repeated.”^[42] Although the move for British government intervention failed, in the battle for public opinion “the RJC clearly won the day,” and the *Times* and the RJC remained good bedfellows.

The Consuls were outraged. Stanley reiterated the fact that his intensive investigations, which he carried out at great personal cost with a serious leg injury, illustrated that “*The Times*’ accounts of what took place at each of those places contains the greatest exaggerations, and that the account of what took place at some of those places is absolutely untrue.”^[43] He related the fact that a Rabbi in Odessa had “not heard of any outrages on women there,” and that the object of almost every pogrom he had investigated was simple “plunder.”^[44] Enraged by the lies circulating in Britain and America, Stanley “went right to the top,” interviewing state rabbis and asking for evidence and touring pogrom sites. In Odessa, where a wealth of atrocity stories had originated, he was able to confirm “one death, but no looting of synagogues or victims set alight.” There was no evidence that a single rape had taken place. One state Rabbi admitted that he had not heard of any outrages of women in Berezovka and further assured Stanley that he “could with a clear conscience positively deny that any deaths or any violations had occurred there during the disturbances of last year.”^[45] He again sent this report to his superior in London, with a note saying “This is in

accordance with all the information I have received and forwarded to your Lordship, and which I think more credible than anonymous letters in *The Times*.”^[46]

Despite Stanley’s best efforts the Jewish narrative advanced by the RJC, imbued with atrocity tales, has remained unalterably attached in Western perceptions of the pogroms. The Blue Book was smothered by the more visible, and oft-repeated, tales of the RJC and organisations like it around the globe. Only with the decade-long research of John Klier has some revision of this narrative, grounded in scholarship and archival evidence, been possible. In light of this evidence, one can only conclude that stories of rape, murder and mutilation were “more legendary than factual.”^[47] However, the task remains to further dismantle and analyse other aspects of the Jewish narrative, and to seek the true motives behind its creation.

Go to Part 3

[1] <http://archive.org/stream/persecutionofjew00russ>

[2] Max Beloff, *The Intellectual in Politics: And other essays*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1970) p.135

[3] *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, (London: Russo-Jewish Committee, 1899), p.3.

[4] Ibid, p.4

[5] *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, (London: Russo-Jewish Committee, 1899), p.5

[6] Ibid, p.8

[7] Ibid, p.36

[8] Ibid, p.38.

[9] Anthony Heywood, *The Russian Revolution of 1905: Centenary Perspectives*(New York: Routledge, 2005) p.266.

[10] “Jewish Massacre Denounced,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1903, p.6

[11] Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.35

[12] Ibid, p.34.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Joseph Brandes, *Immigrants to Freedom*, (New York: Xlibris, 2009) p.171

[15] *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, (London: Russo-Jewish Committee, 1899), p.4

[16] *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, (London: Russo-Jewish Committee, 1899), p.30

[17] Ibid.

[18] Albert Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p.291.

[19] John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-82*, p.399

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, p.400

[23] Edward Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) p.89.

[24] John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-82*, p.400

[25] Ibid, p.401

[26] Ibid

- [27] Ibid.
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] Ibid, p.12
- [32] Ibid, p.404
- [33] Ibid.
- [34] Ibid, p.405. (*Correspondence Respecting the Treatment of Jews in Russia, Nos. 1 and 2*, 1882, 1883)
- [35] John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-82*, p.405
- [36] Ibid.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Ibid, p.405.
- [39] Ibid.
- [40] Ibid.
- [41] Ibid, p.406.
- [42] Ibid.
- [43] John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-82*, p.407.
- [44] John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881-82*, p.408.
- [45] Ibid.
- [46] Ibid.
- [47] Ibid, p.13.

Myth and the Russian Pogroms Part 3 – The Jewish Role

May 13, 2012

Andrew Joyce

We continue our series of essays examining the Russian Pogroms with this essay on the part played by Jews in provoking the disturbances. As stated in Part Two, one of the key problems with existing historiography on the pogroms (and ‘anti-Semitism’ generally) is that these narratives invariably argue that the plight of the Jews was the result of nothing more than irrational hatred. Jews adopt a meek and passive role in this narrative, having committed no wrong-doing other than being Jews. There is no sense of Jewish agency, and one is left with the impression that Jews historically have lacked the capacity to *act* in the world. In almost every single academic and popular history of the pogroms, the author blindly accepts, or willfully perpetuates, the basic premise that Jews had been hated in the Russian Empire for centuries, that this hatred was irrational and rootless, and that the outbreak of anti-Jewish riots late in the 19th century was a ‘knee-jerk’ emotional response to the assassination of the Tsar and some blood libel accusations.

This is of course far from the truth, but the prevalence of this ‘victim paradigm’ plays two significant roles. Firstly, Jewish historiography is saturated with allusions to the “unique” status of Jews, who have suffered a “unique” hatred at the hands of successive generations of Europeans. In essence, it is the notion that Jews stand alone in the world as the quintessential “blameless victim.” To allow for any sense of Jewish agency — any argument that Jews may have in some way contributed to anti-Jewish sentiment — is to harm the perpetuation of this paradigm. In this sense, the ‘victim paradigm’ also contributes heavily to the claim for Jewish uniqueness and, as Norman Finkelstein has pointed out, one can clearly see in many examples of Jewish historiography the tendency to focus not so much on the “suffering of Jews” but rather on the simple fact that “Jews suffered.”^[1] As a result, the paradigm offers no place to non-Jewish suffering. Simply put, the ‘victim paradigm’ is a form of secular “chosenness.” This aspect of the narrative is seen, quite rightly, as a useful tool in the here and now. There is perhaps no race on earth which uses its history to justify its actions in the present quite like the Jewish people. From seeking reparations to establishing nation states, Jewish history is one of the foundation stones propping up Jewish international politics in the present. As such, Jewish history is carefully constructed and fiercely defended. The interplay between Jewish history and contemporary Jewish politics is plain to see — I need only make reference to the terms “revisionist” and “denier” to conjure up images of puppet trials and prison cells.

Secondly, the omission of the Jewish contribution to the development of anti-Semitism (be it in a village setting or a national setting), leaves the spotlight burning all the more ferociously on the ‘aggressor.’ Within this context, the blameless victim is free to make the most ghastly accusations, basking in the assurance that his own role, and by extension his own character, is unimpeachable. The word of this untainted, unique, blameless victim is taken as fact — to doubt his account is to be in league with the ‘aggressor.’ In Part Two we explored the manner in which the RJC took full advantage of this construct to purvey appalling, and unfounded, atrocity stories. More generally, exaggerated tales of brutality by non-Jews are commonplace in Jewish literature and historiography, and go hand in hand with images of dove-like Jews. For example, Finkelstein has pointed to Jerzy Kosinski’s *The Painted Bird*,

a work now widely acknowledged as “the first major Holocaust hoax,” as an example of this “pornography of violence.”^[2] The twin concepts of Jewish blamelessness and extreme Gentile brutality are inextricably bound up together, and supporters of one strand of the ‘victim paradigm’ are invariably supporters of the other. Take for example that high priest of Jewish chosenness, Elie Wiesel, who praised Kosinski’s pastiche of sadomasochistic fantasies as “written with deep sincerity and sensitivity.”^[3]

Advertisement

Having clarified this theoretical framework, we now turn our attention to deconstructing the second strand of the pogrom ‘victim paradigm.’ To deal most effectively with the question of Jewish culpability in the souring of relations between Jews and non-Jews, we will need to probe deeper, and with more focus, than we endeavored to do in Part One. This essay will focus on specific examples of anti-Jewish disturbance in the Russian Empire prior to 1880, with a particular focus on Jewish economic practices preceding these events.

Anti-Jewish Riots in the Russian Empire Before 1880

For the reasons discussed above, the majority of Jewish historians have long displayed an aversion to the idea that Jewish economic practices have played a significant role historically in provoking anti-Semitism. For example, Leon Poliakov in *The History of anti-Semitism: From Voltaire to Wagner*, argues that the idea of economic anti-Semitism is “devoid of real explanatory value.”^[4] Similarly, Jonathan Freedman has stated that, in explaining anti-Jewish attitudes, economic anti-Semitism should play only a very “small explanatory role.”^[5] Both of these historians posit that theology, and by extension Christianity (and therefore Western culture) is the fount and origin of anti-Semitism. Robert Weinberg, in his 1998 article on *Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History*, explains anti-Semitic outbreaks of violence in Eastern Europe by stating that they were the product of “the frustrations of Russian and Ukrainian peasants, workers and town dwellers who, for the most part, spontaneously took out their frustrations on a time-honored scapegoat, the Jews.”^[6] Weinberg refrains from stating where precisely these ‘frustrations’ emerge from, but note again the extremely passive Jewish role in his analysis.

Conversely, those historians who have accepted that economic issues have played a role in provoking anti-Semitism fail to engage in actual case studies of economically provoked anti-Jewish actions, preferring instead to probe “images” or stereotypes which allegedly infuse the consciousness of non-Jews. For example Professor of Israel Studies at Oxford University, Derek J. Penslar, has stated that economic anti-Semitism is nothing more than “a double helix of intersecting paradigms, the first associating the Jew with paupers and savages and the second conceiving of Jews as conspirators, leaders of a financial cabal seeking global domination.”^[7] By choosing to discuss “images” and concepts rather than say, an actual incident such as the Limerick Anti-Jewish Riots, Penslar engages in a practice equally duplicitous to that engaged in by Poliakov and Freedman. Penslar’s thesis only superficially acknowledges the economic role, while really lending more weight to the argument that European society has suffered some kind of neurosis in relation to its Jews. Penslar deftly offers us an argument in which Jews and economics play a role in the development of an anti-Semitic “image,” without placing the Jew in anything but a passive role. Penslar’s “images” are also devoid of gradation — Europeans, if they hold to economically motivated anti-Semitism, either view Jews as pauper savages or global financiers. This despite the case that most European

peasants simply didn't *need* to have these extreme conceptions of Jews, and probably didn't. Exploitative economic practices by local Jewish capitalists, the existence of local Jewish monopolies on such items as alcohol, and the Jewish practice of in-group/out-group ethics would be more than sufficient to provoke anti-Jewish resentment.

But references to *this* motivation for anti-Jewish action is entirely absent from Jewish historiography on the causes of anti-Semitism, most likely because it comes extremely close to demolishing the 'victim paradigm.' This essay, which focuses on actual case studies (in particular the city of Odessa), will argue that the anti-Jewish riots of the 1880s, like many riots before them, were motivated by economic anti-Semitism, and that this economic anti-Semitism had its origins not in the European psyche, but in the day to day economic interactions of Jews had with the non-Jews of Odessa. It attempts to rediscover the Jewish role, and to place it front and centre.

The first disturbance involving Jews to occur in the Russian Empire, and which left sufficient documentation, was the 1821 Odessa pogrom. Weinberg has painted a picture of Odessa as being some kind of multicultural heaven at this time. He states that the city "benefited from the presence of German, Italian, French, Greek, and English residents whose cultural and intellectual tastes influenced local life."^[8] By the 1820s street signs were written in Russian and Italian, the city's first newspaper appeared in French. Odessa, according to Weinberg, had a thriving art scene, particularly in relation to theatre, music, and opera.

However, Klier paints a radically different picture of the city, stressing in particular the ethnic tension created by increasing Jewish settlement in the city. Klier states that by 1821, Odessa was "a hotbed of ethnic, religious, and economic rivalries" and was, quite significantly, "a distinctly non-Russian city."^[9] Weinberg explains that "the number of Jews arriving from other parts of the Russian Empire and Galicia in the Austrian Empire skyrocketed." In Odessa, Jews were entirely free from "legal burdens and residency restrictions."^[10]

Violence erupted in 1821 when, during the Greek War of Independence, a group of Muslims and Jews murdered and then mutilated Gregory V, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Istanbul. In the aftermath, many Greeks fled with Gregory's remains from Istanbul to Odessa, where his funeral procession was held. Surviving documents suggest that violence broke out when a large contingent of Odessa's Jewish population showed open disrespect for the procession.^[11]

In describing this and subsequent outbreaks of violence in Odessa, I must urge readers to divest themselves of the preconception that the Jewish contingent of the city was a tiny minority. Jewish historians are often quick to allude to minority status without providing definitive numbers. John Doyle Klier, however, informs us that by the middle of the nineteenth century Jews constituted "almost one-third of the total population" in Odessa.^[12] Given the huge population of Greeks and other nationalities, it was the Russians who composed the "tiny minority." Economic supremacy in the city until the middle of the nineteenth century was the preserve of the Greek population, which had fended off the attempts of numerous other ethnic groups to "secure or maintain a favored economic position."^[13]

When a huge influx of Jews occurred in the 1850s, the struggle for economic supremacy between Jew and Greek, added to historical religiopolitical grievances, contributed to increased inter-ethnic tension in the city. Greek historian Evridiki Sifneos informs us that earlier co-existence had "not been based on mutual toleration. On the contrary, economic recession in the second half of the nineteenth century accelerated ethnic distinctions, and resentment was provoked by the ascension of social or ethnic groups [primarily Jewish], which led to the redistribution of resources."^[14] Until the mid-1850s, the Greeks had control of grain exports, but with the disruption of trade routes as a result of the Crimean War, some local Greek business owners were forced into bankruptcy. The city's Jews, who had earlier occupied mainly middleman roles, pooled resources and eagerly bought up these businesses at extremely low prices. A letter from one Greek contemporary reads: "When I first

came to Odessa in 1864, I became a purchaser of grain on behalf of our house, 14 at Moldovanka. The majority were Greeks, with a few Russian middlemen. Now there are no Russians, and as for the Greeks they are counted on the fingers of one hand. Jews are the ones who have taken over the market.”^[15] According to Sifneos, Jews took advantage of the placement of their taverns in the villages to establish themselves as middlemen in the collection of grain from the surrounding countryside, and in addition “they worked more tightly within their ethnic network.”^[16] Weinberg further states that when “Jewish employers followed the practice of only hiring their own, many Greek dockworkers now found themselves in the ranks of the unemployed.”^[17] When it became apparent that Jews had wrested economic supremacy from the Greeks in 1858, incidences of inter-ethnic violence began to escalate in frequency. In 1858 there were attacks on Greek and Jewish property, and numerous “Greek-Jewish brawls” in the city, and in 1859 a quarrel between Greek and Jewish children again escalated into full-scale inter-ethnic conflict. Violence was ended thanks only to the intervention of Russian police and Cossacks.^[18] A major bout of Greek-Jewish violence occurred again in 1869.

How do we describe such events? In light of the context of these disturbances, does the term “pogrom” or “anti-Jewish riot” withstand scrutiny? Certainly not. Note my use of the terms “inter-ethnic violence” and “disturbance involving Jews.” These terms do not feature in Jewish historiography on these events. “Anti-Jewish riot” or “pogrom” is merely part of the lexicon of the ‘victim paradigm,’ bequeathing passive status even through word use. To express it flippantly, when Tom and Bill have a fight in the street, one does not describe it as “anti-Tom violence.” This automatically imparts passive, victim status to Tom, despite the fact that he may have started the fight, and certainly threw as many punches. Weinberg, for example, describes the 1859 disturbance as “anti-Jewish activity,” but states that both “Jewish and gentile youths engaged in bloody brawls.”^[19] This is an obvious contradiction in terms.

It is only in 1871, during a particularly severe bout of disturbances, that we see the first Russian involvement in Odessa’s inter-ethnic violence. The late John Doyle Klier, formerly Professor of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at Oxford University, informs us categorically that Russian involvement in the 1871 Odessa ethnic conflict had its roots in real, tangible economic grievances. Klier states that Russian participation was the result of “bitterness born of the exploitation of their work by Jews and the ability of the latter to enrich themselves and manipulate all manner of trade and commercial activity.”^[20] Similarly, Weinberg concedes that by 1871, there were “many others besides Greeks who perceived Jews as an economic threat.”^[21]

The roots of the 1871 disturbance are quite tangible, and there is a tremendous amount of evidence suggesting it was the result of real socio-economic grievances, rather than “images,” “stereotypes,” or any of the other usual suspects wheeled out in Jewish historiography. Brian Horowitz, Chair of Jewish Studies at Tulane University argues that by 1870 Jewish economic and social cohesiveness had been further enhanced in Odessa by founding of a branch of the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment, an organization dedicated to in-group philanthropy as well as “alternative politics” whereby members “did not contact the government as an intercessor.”^[22] In this respect, it was the *kahal*-lite, and it had a significant positive impact on the wealth of Odessa Jewry. Klier states that under this organisation, the Jewish grip on the economic life of the city grew stronger, and that Russian government reports from 1871 attribute the disturbance above all to the fact that “the economic domination of the Jews in the area produced abnormal relations between Christians and Jews.”^[23] By 1871, Jewish economic domination had moved beyond grain exports. A US consular report from that year reveals the extent of Jewish control over Odessa’s economic life. It reports that Jews in the city “occupy themselves with trade and favoring their own class or sect, that is that their combinations, in a great many instances, amount almost to monopolies. The common remark,

therefore, is that ‘everything is in the hands of the Jews.’ To sell or buy a house, a horse, a carriage, to rent a lodging or contract for a loan, to engage a governess, and sometimes even to marry a wife the Jew gets his percent as a “go between.” The poor laborer, the hungry soldier, the land proprietor, the money capitalist, and in fact every producer and every consumer is obliged in one way or another to pay tribute to the Jew.”[24]

Impoverished Greeks, Russians and Ukrainians looked on at increasingly ostentatious displays of Jewish wealth. In fact, Sifneos states that contemporary correspondence reveals that during the disturbances, many of Odessa’s Jews attributed the trouble “to the widespread resentment against the growing prosperity of their community.”[25] Sifneos also informs us that demographic shifts in the city were of extreme importance in creating unease among non-Jewish populations. In line with increasing wealth, the 1897 census revealed that during the preceding two decades Odessa Jewry was undergoing an extremely rapid demographic explosion, and that Odessa was “rapidly becoming a predominantly Jewish city.”[26] To put this into some kind of perspective, the 1897 Odessa census reveals that by that date there were 5,086 Greek speakers, 10,248 German speakers, 1,137 French speakers, and 124,520 Yiddish speakers. The census further revealed that while almost all of the Greek and French speakers were predominantly residing in the inner city slum areas, a huge 54% of Odessa’s Jews were living in the middle-class suburbs of Petropavlovsky, Mikhailovsky, and Peresipsky.[27]

To conclude, when inter-ethnic violence broke out in 1871, it was not rooted in irrationality, but was quite obviously, as Sifneos argues, a desperate attempt to “weaken the economic power of the Jews.”[28] In this context, we see the Jews of Odessa emerge from their passive role in the shadows of Jewish historiography, and how they truly appear in the cold light of day.

[1] Norman Finkelstein, ‘The Holocaust Industry,’ *Index on Censorship*, 29:2, 120-130, p.124

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid, p.125.

[4] Leon Poliakov *The History of anti-Semitism: From Voltaire to Wagner* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) p.viii

[5] Jonathan Freedman, *The Temple of Culture: Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p.60.

[6] Robert Weinberg, ‘Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,’ *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.72

[7] Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001) p.13.

[8] Robert Weinberg, ‘Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,’ *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.73

[9] John Klier, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.15

[10] Robert Weinberg, ‘Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,’ *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.73

[11] John Klier, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.16.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid, p.15

[14] Evridiki Sifneos, 'The Dark Side of the Moon: Rivalry and Riots for Shelter and Occupation Between the Greek and Jewish Populations in multi-ethnic Nineteenth Century Odessa,' *The Historical Review*, Vol.3 (2006), p.191

[15] Ibid, p.195

[16] Ibid, p.196

[17] Robert Weinberg, 'Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,' *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.75.

[18] Ibid, p.18

[19] Robert Weinberg, 'Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,' *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.74

[20] John Klier, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.21

[21] Robert Weinberg, 'Visualizing Pogroms in Russian History,' *Jewish History*, Vol.12 (1998), 71-92, p.75.

[22] Brian Horowitz, *How Jewish was Odessa?* : <http://www.wilsoncenter.net/sites/default/files/OP301.pdf#page=17>

[23] John Klier, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) p.22

[24] Evridiki Sifneos, 'The Dark Side of the Moon: Rivalry and Riots for Shelter and Occupation Between the Greek and Jewish Populations in multi-ethnic Nineteenth Century Odessa,' *The Historical Review*, Vol.3 (2006), p.198

[25] Evridiki Sifneos, 'The Dark Side of the Moon: Rivalry and Riots for Shelter and Occupation Between the Greek and Jewish Populations in multi-ethnic Nineteenth Century Odessa,' *The Historical Review*, Vol.3 (2006), p.193

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.